1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

## *Chapter XIV*

## GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

I

WHATEVER the rôle of the great man in the life of a people, there are names whose very mention bring up almost full-bodied an epoch, a great dynamic sweep of human thought and activity, of achievement, and sometimes of disaster. Perhaps the great individual does not exist until the poetic vision of a people gives to the skeleton of a name the flesh of a godhead. From earliest times and from people of varying civilizations have come down tales of these godheads, created, let us say if we like, out of a psychic need in the life of human beings to exalt personality in order that, imaginatively at least, the chasm between desire and insufficiency might be spanned.

In the council house of Granman Yankuso, as we listened to his stories, these thoughts constantly recurred to us, and it is not strange, therefore, that now as we try to collect images and impressions of the man for an objective picture of him not only as a Bush Negro but as an individual, we think of him as typifying among the Negroes of the Saramacca today such a name and such a personality.

Already Moana Yankuso was something of a myth among the people of the coastal region and among his own people.

Men on the coast said, "Granman Yankuso is a silent man. You will be with him for days, and he will never utter a word."

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## GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

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"Granman Yankuso is the tallest man on the river, and the darkest," they said. "He speaks little. When he is angry, his growl strikes terror in all who hear him."

People said, "The Granman is a clever man. You can tell him about your work in the way you would speak to your own educated men, and he will understand you."

"They will take away everything you have up there on the river."

"They will never bring you to the Granman. He will see to it."

In the villages of the Saramacca country we heard again and again proverbs he had originated, which were quoted when men told of this almost mythical personality.

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"The Granman says, 'No one must die, but the burial place cannot lie idle,' " Bayo once quoted him.

"What does it mean, Bayo?"

"It is deep, white man. The Granman is wise."

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Kasanya once quoted another of the Granman's proverbs. "If the gods say take one step at a time, do not stand still, and take two steps the next time in anger."

On this river they told us that Granman Moana Yankuso knew all that went on. It was a kind of magic he had: whatever men did anywhere, he knew.

And they said, too, that men were afraid to cross him, not alone because of his rank, but because his spirits were strong.

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It is difficult to be objective about Moana Yankuso. In the terms his own people use, the explanation of his personality would be the explanation given of any other.

"He has strong gods."

If we urged them to explain what were the gods of a man they were praising, they would describe the Tiger spirit the man had, and what knowledge of healing and future events his Opete obia, his buzzard spirit, gave him, and how he had come by a special obia which had passed down to him from a famous magician of the earliest times.

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643 159 In our own terms, if we were to picture the Granman as a splendid savage, cheerful, guileless, childlike, flattered by our interest, we would be belying his gifts of sophistication, and he would thank us little for these romantic outlines which, according to the values of his own civilization, would be insulting.

829 538 776 The code of life among these people was expressed in the proverb we had heard often spoken. "There are men on the upper river, there are men on the lower river, too." For survival in this bush, a man needed to match his strength and his wits and his magic, his kindliness and his enmity against those of any other. And the Bush Negro is a realist, for, as we had seen, not even the gods could be depended upon to be consistent—consistently good or consistently evil. The Bush Negro's gods, like humans, often did things for unaccountable reasons, because of a momentary whim, because of a desire to try the untried.

829 181 It was good to be guileless, but sometimes a man had to be a tiger, had to stalk his prey from behind. It was well enough to be a tiger, but sometimes a man needed the cunning of the bush hero, spider Anansi, who knew how to outwit the tiger. It was well enough to be an eagle, and be free and fly high, but sometimes a man needed the wit of the little bird konubri, who became king of all birds, because, when in the kingdom of birds there was a contest for the throne, it was he who, by perching on the back of the eagle, flew highest of all.

643 159 In the simplest of our own terms, Granman Moana Yankuso could be said to be a superb politician. In his villages, marriage alliances were calculated with the nicety of the best statesmanship. Whatever his own views, he saw to it that he never defied the arbiters of magic or the clan of the seat of magic, the Dahomey people. Toward the women of strange villages who came to see the white man and his woman, he showed an easy gallantry, which could not have been but flattering. When addressing the women who carried children astride their backs, he would speak gently to them and call them "mother" in greeting, and

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for the young girls he had the cavalier address of "wenki," possibly the English word wench under its seventeenth century connotation of young woman.

We had, thanks to the gods, perhaps, never seen him in the rôle of tiger, unless his parting krutu with the four Gankwe men could be said to symbolize its mood, if not its manner. To suggest that any full-grown Bush Negro—a man who had Kromanti—would be incapable, when need arose, of being the tiger, would, of course, be looked upon as the deepest affront.

But Moana Yankuso was more than an astute politician. Using our own values again, we admired his vitality, his dignity, his robust imagination, his wit. Perhaps what struck us particularly about him, when we came to know him in situations with his own people, was that here was a man who in intellect and will towered so much above those who were about him that he was a lonely figure. His age had become something of a myth, too. People said he was seventy, that he was more than that, that he was scarcely sixty. We had never seen his head without the covering kerchief, so that it was difficult to form any definite impression about his years. But in strength he was still a colossus, though it was not true that he was the tallest or the strongest or the darkest man on the river. His own son-in-law, Wilhelmina's husband, was perhaps a head taller than he, as was the drummer at Akisiamau, who had played the agida for us. We had seen him, cutlass in hand, clearing a path for us through the underbrush with amazing rapidity, as the courteous gesture of a host who wanted to insure our bathing in privacy. Had the underbrush been of papier-mâché, he could not have swung his strokes more surely or more tellingly.

Above all else, however, Granman Moana Yankuso was a magnificent talker, a fine story-teller. What we give of his conversations, and what incidents we describe, may suggest something of his personality. His full story will never be written.

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## REBEL DESTINY

### 3

643 "Tell me this," said Granman Yankuso to us one evening
159 when we sat alone with him in the council house, "why
186 is it that things have changed so in the city? I am not a
178 young man. For years I came to the city, and when I met Negro women of the town going to market or coming from market, they were dressed in full skirts. They looked well. Now the women dress in straight dresses like men. Straight up and down and short. They want to look like white people.

"Years ago when I came to the city, I used to hear Negroes laugh. It is good to hear laughter. Now they are trying to be like the whites. They do not laugh. That is not good. It would be better if white people laughed more, too.

"Why do Negroes want to turn into white people? Look, is my skin like yours? Is my daughter's hair like yours, white woman? If you put on a pangi, you will not look like my daughter. You, white man, are as tall as Captain And'u. If you put on a cloth over one shoulder, you will not look like And'u. . . .

"A man came to me in the city and said he wanted to go to Dahomey. He wore no obias. He was a white man's Negro. I said he couldn't go to Dahomey. The man said, 'Look, my skin is as black as yours.' 'Ai, but your heart isn't.'

"You know why I said it? There is your kind of magic, white man, and there is our kind of magic. White man's magic keeps men in cities, but here in the bush a man needs black man's magic to keep alive and black man's strength to go up and down the rivers.

"You white men have books. You read in books, and you know. I cannot read what men write, yet I can read in my own way. I meet a man, and I can read him. I look at him, and I know what he is thinking. Before he begins to talk, I know what he wants to say. What your ancestors knew they put down in books, and you read it. What our ancestors know, they tell us at night, they tell us in the cool of the

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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morning, they tell us when we call on them. That is the black man's way.

"You white people have money, you have fine houses, you wear clothes, you can count. They tell me that you say in your books all people must be friends. But you have wars. If white people kill white people, then *mati*—friend—how will it be with black people living among the whites?"

Granman Yankuso rose, when he said this, and took from the chains of the suspended lamp a folded envelope. He handed it to us, and from it we took out a letter on the stationery of the League of Nations, signed by its Secretary, Sir Eric Drummond. As we were reading this, he left the council house and soon returned with a larger envelope, which he had kept uncreased, and from it brought out a photograph of the Council of the League of Nations in session. They were his proud possessions. While the World War lasted there was no work for the Bush Negroes on the river. They could not earn the money they needed to buy cloths for marrying and powder and rum for ceremonial usage. The Bush Negroes called it a "great money famine," in the way of their Anansi stories which so often began with "This was a time of great famine." Through a missionary on the upper river, the Granman learned of the war, and through him later of the League, which the missionary had undoubtedly brought up as the white man's defense against the challenge of the black tribal head, who asked, "How will it be with black people living among the whites?"

It was then that the Granman through this same missionary addressed himself to the white rulers far away, telling of the fear of the blacks, and counseling them the wisdom of peace!

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In the council house Granman Moana Yankuso was host to the Gankwe men. They were there to take their leave of him before starting down river. Asikanu, the handsome brother of the Gankwe clan head, who was sent away from his village while the elders were deciding upon his adultery

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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always given to children in the white man's camp. With her, too, came Sedefo's eldest son, the one who had already danced Kromanti. 183

"White man," he said in a soft confidential voice that was like his father's, "you gave the Granman gifts. Lower river chiefs are big men, too." This was a prelude to the suggestion that the Gankwe chief would not take it amiss if we sent him a pith helmet.

From the village where we had seen Bayo possessed the night before, Tenye and her two brothers, Yamati and Sabape, came to say goodbye, and with them was their "father" Semiye, Abane's brother. He was to have been "captain" of our dugout, but several days before he had told us he would be unable to go with us to the railhead. As haltingly he gave us his reasons, we wished that white men's lives were not keyed to railroad and boat and university schedules—wished, too, that it were possible to give a happier turn to the drama which bush destiny seemed ready to stage for Semiye.

Semiye was as slender and graceful as Abane, that superb dancer whom Yamati and Sabape, sons by different wives, wished so much to emulate. The passion which Abane had for dancing, Semiye knew to flare up within himself when he was at work. No man on the lower river could send a heavily loaded boat up the rapids faster than Semiye, and when he went fishing or lumbering, the catch he brought back was large, his timber rafts were valuable. He had not always felt this drive for work. When he and his village friend Abai were boys together, Abai had been the one to suggest games, to make decisions, to show courage in leading girls down side paths into the bush. When the time came for Semiye to go through the Kromanti initiation, he could not do the feats which Abai did so easily and with such bravado. Later, when the courage of a man was his, he was ashamed to ask for permission to go through the initiatory rites that were intended to test boys, and so Semiye was one of the few men on the river who was not a Kromanti man. 159

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159 In spite of all this, Semiye prospered. He married first one wife and then a second, and his five children were healthy and bright. But Abai, poor fellow, had had a hard time. His wife was a scold. His small son was straight-limbed and alert, but his girl child was ailing, and three of his children had died before they could walk. These days, when a load was to be carried for some white man to the city, Semiye was the one most often hired, and, because of their friendship, he saw to it that Abai went, too. Abai, who as a youth had led in all their escapades, grew more and more silent, but when the Tiger spirit possessed him, it made him noisy and violent and caused him to run about in search of Semiye with the threat to kill him. In the village they said Abai's spirit was growing ugly; they said that Abai's Tiger spirit hated Semiye. The night before, we ourselves had heard Abai when possessed by his Tiger spirit again threaten Semiye.

For the first time in many years Semiye began to know the old fears, and because this time he had to contend with a powerful spirit, he went to Apanto, the obia man, who gave him a strong obia. Then . . . then he decided it might be best to share work with Apanto occasionally.

"And now," he said, "you know why I can't go with you. I can't go without Apanto, and you promised Bayo he would have the front paddle."

After the dance of the night before, having witnessed Bayo's Tiger spirit in action, it was all very understandable.

Thus it came about that our last hour on the river was spent like so many other hours, with our boat in the competent hands of Bayo. But this time we were not to see him at the prow of the boat, for when we had told him that Semiye could not captain it, he had exclaimed, "Ai-yo! Then I will be your captain, and the son of Sedefo will take the front paddle." So now, with farewells said and canoe loaded, the boat backed away from the familiar landing place, turned, and was off down river, Bayo at the post of command—an honor he would not soon allow his friends to forget.

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Paramaca



175 Marowyne River on account of the Boni and Aucaner tribes,
361 who were long established there and who were much stronger numerically than the newly arrived Paramaccas. They finally came out of the creeks, however, and founded a village on the Dutch side of the Marowyne River near the mouth of the Paramacca Creek. The main seat of the tribe is
[103] now the village of Langa Tabiki (Long Island), which, as the name denotes, is an island in the Marowyne River. This is the village of the Granman. Beside Langa Tabiki, there is
361 the village of Amerika Condree (from a Bush Negro captain
103 called Amerika). This village is situated on the island of Boni Boro, which means the "Bonis arrived." A third important village is that of Akodo Condree, captained by one Akodo and situated on an island of the same name in the Marowyne River. There are lesser villages on the Dutch bank of the Marowyne extending just past the mouth of Gran Creek. The Paramacca village of Seeton Ponta (Pointed Stone) is situated on the French side of the Marowyne. The older villages in the Paramacca and Tempati Creeks have long since been abandoned.

115 In Seeton Ponta we had a long talk with an old Captain
159 Koffay who claims to be some eighty years of age and whose appearance certainly bears him out. He is the grandson of one of the original women slaves who escaped and aided in founding the tribe. He can remember his grandmother telling of the terrible privations of the early days when they first escaped into the jungle, how starvation nearly overtook them on a number of occasions, how they wandered for forty-

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Paramecca



seven days aimlessly in the high bush, and then happened upon the putrid remains of a tapir which had been killed by a jaguar and which food, after they chased the vultures away, was what saved them from starvation. He said that now they call themselves Teegre Nengre (Tiger Negroes), for they believe the jaguar was ordained to save them. One day his grandmother showed him gold in a creek bed and she told him never to touch it for she had seen it make white men crazy. His grandmother was born in Dutch Guiana. She had never told him stories of Africa, but he had heard of it from the Catholic missionaries. He knew that the blacks had come from over the sea, but he had also heard that they were the original inhabitants of the jungle who had been killed off by the Indians, with the exception of a few roving bands who had joined the escaped slaves. (Slaves are known to have escaped as early as 1650 and may have formed bands, which may, in turn, have joined the Boni tribe, for the Boni today are called Aluku Nengre—Indian Negroes—by the Aucaner and Paramacca tribes.) We also heard that the term Aluku Nengre refers to Indians of the Rukuyana tribe, of which one of the women was taken by Awensai, Granman of the Boni, as one of his wives. The term seems to be used in a somewhat opprobrious way on this account.

Old Captain Koffay, clear-minded and vigorous physically, believes that the white man will some day try to re-enslave the Bush Negroes and that there will be another war between them. "Bahkra greedy," said he.

The small Paramacca tribe does much less in the way of

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159 562 613 [591] In March, 1957, Awéni, head of the Afi lineage, established in Asisi, was concerned about regrouping the members of his lineage and especially bringing back to Asisi Magdaléna (c20), a woman of about 45 years who had settled in Kormotibo near her husband L... ( †1955), with her children and others whom she had raised. He went to Kormotibo and pointed out to her that since her husband was dead, she no longer had any reason to stay there and that she should come back to Asisi. Magdaléna insulted him in front of the inhabitants of the village, proclaimed that she had no orders to receive from anybody; then when he insisted, she armed herself with a stick and chased him across the village as far as the landing place. He had to re-embark precipitately to the laughter of the Kormotibo people.

## Political and Legal Powers

643 613 [193] The grand man. The head of the Dikan lo fills the office of grand man of the Boni. The present grand man, Difu, was about 67 years old in 1958.

Oral tradition has kept the names of his seven predecessors:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gongo (Dikan lo) | 1810-1840 | dates noted according to Coudreau |
| Labi (Adam?) (Dikan lo) | 1840-1870 | |
| Atyaba (Kotika lo) | 1870-1876 | |
| Anato (Kotika lo) | 1876-1891 | |
| Ochi (Dikan lo) | 1891-1915 | |
| Awensay id. | 1917-1936 | |
| Difu id. | since 1937. | |

[195] According to information collected by Coudreau in 1887, Gongo was the successor to Agosu, himself successor to Boni. Upon the death of Labi, there were only women and children in the Dikan lo. The office of grand man then passed to the Kotika lo with Atyaba and Anato. It then came back to the Dikan lo with Ochi.

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595 Sticking to statistics, one could say that the Refugee Blacks are monogamous in the proportion of 85 per cent. But 581 it is an apparent monogamy, for unions are not stable; their 586 average duration is about ten years; in fact the Refugee Blacks are practicing polygamy over a period of time.

595 A man who takes another wife apologizes to the first and gives her a liter of tafia, asking her to live on good terms with [586] the co-wife. A certain number of wives do not accept co-wives and get divorced.

587 Most men have had, in general, four or five wives 586 successively. Most of the time these marriages have been 163 broken by the wife. /152/

Example S... (65 years old in 1957) had at least seven wives:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| -- Nanay (Dip. II)† | 1 child | divorced |
| Baakauman (K) † | 3 children | " |
| 1 Paramaka woman | 1 child dead | " |
| Saumè (Dip. I) | 1 child | " |
| Paata (Boniville) | no children | " |
| Emma (Asisi-Aw.B.) | no children | " |
| Masé (K) | " | marriage extant in 1958 |

Kwami (50 years old in 1958) had four wives:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| -- Apinda (Asisi) | no children | divorced |
| Saayé (Dip. I) | several children | " |
| Do (Lapé) | 1 child dead | " |
| Noémi (Asisi-Aw.B.) | I child | marriage extant in 1958 |

159 582 Example of the family life of G... (50 years old in 1958). About 1935 G... married M... (Kotika), a serious-minded and 159 intelligent woman who was very attached to him. Neverthe- 837 less, about the same time he had a clandestine affair with S..., [847] classificatory sister of M..., whom he made pregnant (abortion).

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Since it is forbidden to have two wives at the same time in the same lineage, that produced a scandal and his uncles had to intervene so that he would not be beaten.

After that, without leaving M..., he took officially another wife, A... (Papaïston). They lived together nearly eight years, but A... began to deceive him while he was on a trip. The first time, he only threatened her; the third time he repudiated her.

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[619] Again he officially took another wife, T..., a Djuka from the Tapanahoni.

[589] A year later A..., who wished she had him back, had her uncles intervene so that she might come back into his favor. G..., through deference to her uncles, accepted against his will.

Thus he found himself engaged in three unions, M..., [586] A..., and T.... He thought this situation was leading him to ruin and sacrificed T... although he had no fault to find with her.

[586] Some time afterward A... began to deceive him again and he repudiated her once and for all.

Finally he took a last wife, B... (Asisi), by whom he had no children.

On each of these undertakings he had to submit to violent scenes by his first wife M..., who was very attached to him and would have liked to keep him for herself alone. Nevertheless, she never divorced him and did not provoke difficulties with her co-wives.

[842] He had a child by M... after more than 15 years of sterile marriage.

In 1958 G... was living with M... and B..., who got along well together. He was not looking for any more new adventures.

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175 with their allies. The sites of
648 their villages, marked on Coudreau's
727 map (1888) are in immediate proximity
to those of former Oayana villages.

175 relations must have been created rapidly and in a very natural
648 fashion. The grand man of the Boni is in a way the suzerain of
[643] the Indian chiefs; this situation was not imposed by force; it
results from the privileged situation of the Boni on the river,
which until recent times obliged the Indians to deal through them
in order to trade with the outside world.

Although the Boni took advantage of this situation in days gone by to impose arbitrary rates of exchange upon the Indians, this relation must not be imagined as the exploitation of conquered by conqueror. It is based on the absolute respect of each
648 group for the beliefs and social structure of the other, and an
829 activity for each befitting its inclination. The proverb says:
[439] "To the Boni the river, to the Indians the forest." Thus it is
that the Boni traditionally buy arrows from the Indians, while
the latter buy paddles from them; the meaning of this symobl
is perfectly understood by both.

648 Marriages between the two groups, without being for-
582 bidden, are regarded as contrary to custom (2).

●159 2. The marriage of Grand Man
156 Awensay to an Indian woman about
643 1915 was inspired by complex
648 motives. Toward the end of his life,
582 Awensay could no longer stand the
Boni, his imperious personality
putting up badly with their individualism
and their taste for discussion. He had
established the Indian country a farming
habitation in which he lived nearly all

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year; by taking an Indian woman as his wife he apparently sought to humiliate his subjects.

Awensay's children and grandchildren were all dead in 1957 except for two women, both sterile. There has been no other case of marriage between Boni and Indians.

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439 /294/ In practice, the basis for commercial exchanges is the following: the Indians furnish hammocks, and above all dogs trained for hunting, to which great value is attached. The Boni furnish boats. In days gone by they also brought imported objects, machetes, axes, and beads, but this form of trade has disappeared since the Indians have had the possibility of getting supplies from the Europeans.

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Several observers, coming after Coudreau (1890) and Grébert (1937) in particular, have expressed the opinion that these relations were founded on fear and that the Boni, utilizing mysterious means of pressure, used to oppress the Indians.

After seven missions spent in contact with both, we affirm that these assertions are without foundation. On the contrary, one can only admire the way in which these primitive groups have been able to create loyal and trusting relations with one another. The Indians and Boni who have worked with us have always shown themselves happy to be together. To realize this, it was sufficient to hear the animated conversations they used to have in the evening around the campfires about their respective families, the events which took place in their villages, fishing, or hunting.